BHARATI INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT (BIJMRD)

(Open Access Peer-Reviewed International Journal)

DOI Link : https://doi.org/10.70798/Bijmrd/04090012

Available Online: www.bijmrd.com | BIJMRD Volume: 4 | Issue: 09 | September 2026 | e-ISSN: 2584-1890

Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into Contemporary Education: A Narrative Review

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Abstract: *Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) have become a focal point of discussions around modern educational restructuring in India, particularly in relation to curriculum, teaching methods, and a student's overall growth. Yet, there are numerous types of scholarly works on integrating Indian Knowledge Systems such as conceptual, policy-oriented articles, reviews, and primary empirical studies, across different fields. This study presents a narrative analysis of how Indian Knowledge Systems are being understood and integrated into contemporary education. Besides this, the focus is also on curricular approaches, pedagogical practices, holistic development, teacher preparedness and institutional factors, and critical considerations. Literature of relevance was found on Google Scholar after six key search-term combinations were used which are based on Indian Knowledge Systems, education, pedagogy, curriculum, NEP 2020, and teacher education. The collected literature was analysed and then thematically synthesized into five thematic areas: curriculum and multidisciplinary integration; teaching methods and hands-on learning; holistic development, character and well-being; teacher/educator preparedness and institutional capacity; and critical, inclusive, and evidence-based integration. This synthesis indicates that IKS integration involves curriculum, teaching, educator preparation, institutional support, and critical engagement with diverse knowledge traditions. Yet, most sources are conceptual, review-based, and policy-based, with very few studies being based on empirical evidence and discussing implementation and learning outcomes. It is recommended that future research examine specific educational contexts in which IKS might be introduced and develop an evidence-based understanding of the integration process, inclusivity, and the ways in which it can support development of learners.*

Key Words: *Indian Knowledge Systems; contemporary education; curriculum integration; experiential learning; holistic development*

Introduction: Education is concerned not only with the imparting of disciplinary knowledge, but also with the shaping of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and capabilities that prepare citizens to explore their surroundings; learning is culturally and socially situated, and recognizes the means by which knowledge is generated, disseminated, and experienced (UNESCO, 2009). India's recent education policies reflect the country's commitment to the holistic development of children, balancing the diverse and interconnected domains of mind, body, spirit, and senses, while calling for curriculum and pedagogy to be rooted in Indian as well as local contexts, covering culture, tradition, history, languages, indigenous and traditional ways of learning (Ministry of Education, 2020). This policy system provides a stepping stone towards exploring the place of IKS in contemporary education.

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) refer to different complex and interconnected knowledge traditions developed throughout the Indian subcontinent. They include areas such as philosophy, science, mathematics, medicine, language, arts, virtues, ecology, and education. The body of literature examined describes IKS as a dynamic body of knowledge that includes classical and indigenous concepts and techniques of knowing (Dey & Mitra, 2025; Kumari & Niyogi, 2025). For the area of education, IKS is conceptualized as teachings that are linked to the guru-shishya relationship, experiential learning, dialogue, observation, reflection, and community learning, linking the intellectual, moral, and practical principles of learning (Asagar, 2025; Kumari & Niyogi, 2025).

In India, IKS is reflected in recent reforms of the current education system. In this context, existing literature talks about using IKS in curriculum and its multidisciplinary linkages with contemporary disciplines, using IKS through experiential and practice-based learning, Indian languages, traditional practices, and community-based knowledge, with teacher training and development, institutional efforts, research, and publication providing support for implementation (Baral, 2024; Khan & Sharma, 2024a; Vageeshan & Kamalakar, 2025).

But the application of IKS in the contemporary education system presents different challenges. The discussions emphasize teacher and faculty development, access to appropriate learning resources, curriculum modifications, academic fidelity, acknowledgment of various knowledge systems, including indigenous, tribal, and folk knowledge traditions, as well as those of marginalised communities, and the risks of uniformity, romanticism, and uncritical acceptance of traditional claims (Asagar, 2025; Chatterjee, 2025; Dey & Mitra, 2025; Kumari & Niyogi, 2025). Such discussions imply that the application of IKS requires epistemological, pedagogical, institutional, and ethical considerations rather than mere inclusion in the curriculum.

The topic of integration of indigenous knowledge systems into education has been discussed in the literature through various aspects such as curriculum, pedagogy, holistic development, teacher preparation, and institutional aspects of implementation. However, the available evidence is spread over different educational contexts as well as conceptual perspectives. Most of the reviewed sources are descriptive and focus on fundamental concepts, policy statements, or secondary reports.

Because of this, the literature highlights the necessity of investigating the factors that would allow for the successful integration of IKS in such a way that academic standards, inclusivity, contextual relevance, and alignment with contemporary educational aims are upheld. A narrative review, to some extent, brings together these different parts of IKS integration to examine the methods, practices, potential areas, and obstacles surrounding the incorporation of IKS. A narrative review, because of this, aims at uncovering the ways in which indigenous knowledge systems have been introduced and implemented in contemporary education, with a focus on educational practices, possible contributions to overall development, and also issues related to the implementation of such changes.

The review aims to: (1) Examine how Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) are understood and defined in contemporary education; (2) Identify the methods suggested in the literature for integrating IKS into education; (3) Examine the educational actions and potential contributions associated with IKS integration; and (4) Identify the issues and major considerations arising from the integration of IKS into contemporary education.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Review Design: The review was conducted using the narrative review method to look at literature on the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) within the modern education system. The literature consists

of conceptual papers, policy statements, review articles, and empirical research covering various contexts in the education sector, so a narrative method was selected. The review synthesised the literature together with common themes in IKS integration, teaching methods, holistic development, teacher and institutional readiness, and critical insights into inclusive and evidence-based integration.

2.2 Literature Search Strategy: Google Scholar was used as a primary search platform. The literature search was done to look for literature that examines Indian Knowledge Systems and their interconnection with the present-day education system. We employed six key search strings: "Indian Knowledge Systems" AND education; "Indian Knowledge Systems" AND "contemporary education"; "Indian Knowledge Systems" AND teaching methods; "Indian Knowledge Systems" AND course content; "Indian Knowledge Systems" AND "NEP 2020"; and "Indian Knowledge Systems" AND "teacher education". These searches enabled us to identify appropriate academic resources, which were then gathered and organised.

2.3 Selection of Literature: The relevance of the source to IKS and contemporary education determined whether or not it would be considered as a source for the inclusion or exclusion of a study. We considered only research articles, books, and policy documents that dealt with the issue of IKS from an education-related perspective. We gave preference to the literature that dealt with, among others, the conceptual understanding of IKS, how to include the subject matter and the methods of teaching in the school or university curriculum, and pedagogy, practices, holistic development (physical, cognitive, spiritual, social, mental, etc.), teacher and faculty preparedness, institutional implementation, and critical considerations on the integration of IKS. We also looked at the literature that addressed the integration of IKS into education policy, mainly NEP 2020, when necessary, as well. Yet, we excluded all sources (articles, studies, reports, etc.) that did not have a direct or strong connection to the subject of education or to the integration of IKS into contemporary educational contexts, respectively.

2.4 Data Extraction and Thematic Synthesis: Initially, we gathered the works reviewed and stored them in an Excel table, which made it easier to, for example, compare and conduct a synthesis of different articles. The collection involved author(s), year, title, journal or book reference, study type, research method(s) or design, key point, IKS aspects, findings or major points made by the papers, obstacles or weaknesses of the study, and the usefulness of the content to the research problem. We then checked the list of documents to find those which appeared more often, the areas where people were in agreement, and those where divergences appeared. By identifying and analysing repetitive issues, practices, dilemmas, and concepts in the papers, the literature was inductively grouped into themes.Ultimately, there were five themes identified: (1) curriculum and interdisciplinary integration of IKS, (2) pedagogical approaches and experiential learning, (3) holistic development, values, and well-being, (4) teacher/faculty preparedness and institutional capacity, and (5) critical, inclusive, and evidence-based integration. These themes form the basis of the thematic analysis and the discussion that follows.

3. Thematic Synthesis Of Literature

3.1 Curriculum and Interdisciplinary Integration of IKS: Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) may be brought into the current educational system through various strategies like special courses, integrating IKS content with already existing subjects, interdisciplinary links, and by involving Indian languages, local knowledge systems, and traditional practices. Therefore, IKS have been viewed as a source that could link knowledge across disciplines and cultures (Baral, 2024; Khan & Sharma, 2024a).

Literature also highlights different implementation strategies which range from offering a foundational or elective course and designing the curriculum for a multidisciplinary approach to incorporating subjects by combining the local languages, cultures, arts, and so forth with the formal subjects. Literature also points out several ways to bring in learning and practice in the real world, and in particular in the colleges, these kinds

of activities would involve knowledge carriers and field-based learning (Baral, 2024; Bera, 2025; Khan & Sharma, 2024a).

But literature varies greatly in terms of integrating IKS. Whereas some emphasize the inclusion of and preservation of the traditional knowledge base, others argue for the critical modification of such a basis to make it relevant for and responsive to the contemporary educational setting. Different concerns have to be considered, such as seeing the traditions as a homogeneous body of knowledge, the overload of the curriculum for students, superficially integrating knowledge without understanding it, and not adequately recognizing the indigenous, tribal, folk, and other such marginal knowledge systems (Asagar, 2025; Chatterjee, 2025; Dey & Mitra, 2025; Kumari & Niyogi, 2025; Vageeshan & Kamalakar, 2025).

In general, the literature indicates that bringing IKS into the syllabus means more than simply inserting a few IKS modules or even a course on such lines. It is the process through which holders of traditional knowledge and contemporary knowledge interact, co-create, reinterpret, and position such knowledge in specific educational contexts. However, empirical studies indicate that implementation of various types of curricula remains scarce, thereby highlighting the necessity of conducting context-specific research into the integration of IKS into educational settings.

3.2 Pedagogical Approaches and Experiential Learning: The literature has linked IKS with those forms of learning that are learner-centred and experiential and which are characterized by participation, interaction, observation, reflection, and practical engagement. These traditional methods are also discussed together with new educational approaches such as project-based, inquiry-based, field-based, collaborative, and community-oriented learning(Asagar, 2025; Kumari & Niyogi, 2025).

These teaching methods are described through examples of storytelling, conversation activities, the use of real-world settings, group projects, active engagement at the community level, and reflections. Yoga, meditation, guidance, and interacting with practitioners or community knowledge holders are also seen as potential components of education informed by IKS (Baral, 2024; Bera, 2025; Khan & Sharma, 2024a; Vageeshan & Kamalakar, 2025). These methods point towards educational strategies that would bridge theory and practice, culture, ethics, and society in a holistic and integral way.

However, a straightforward replication of traditional teaching methods without modification would probably not be acceptable or effective in modern educational systems. Therefore, it is important to consider such elements as culture, languages, the social environment, the institutional systems, as well as the needs and requirements of contemporary learners. A number of researchers have pointed out that the use of traditional methods at the surface level or merely as a formality could be harmful, while at the same time it has been strongly emphasized that it is the teachers who are the main link between the implementation of IKS and modern teaching methods(Asagar,2025; Chatterjee, 2025; Kumari & Niyogi, 2025).

Generally, learning through direct experience, participation in dialogue and continuous interaction, context-based learning, and learning directed towards actual practice have emerged as key elements of a pedagogy inspired by indigenous knowledge systems. Yet, the findings are mostly conceptual and descriptive, and there are relatively few empirical studies on these implementations and outcomes in various contexts.

3.3 Holistic Development, Values, and Well-being: Linking indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) with holistic development is a widely discussed topic in the literature. Different authors define holistic development as having intellectual abilities, physical health, emotional growth, ethical standards, social life, spiritual aspects, values, personality, self-awareness, wellness, and responsible behaviour towards society and environment (Asagar, 2025; Baral, 2024; Kumari & Niyogi, 2025).

Different studies explain how these aspects are reflected in the form of different practices like Yoga, meditation, mindfulness, ethical reflection, traditional arts and crafts, community involvement, environmental activities, and experiential learning. Other values identified as being influenced by education that combines IKS with other systems include self-discipline, respect, cultural sensitivity, and social responsibility (Asagar, 2025; Baral, 2024; Dey & Mitra, 2025).

Even so, these connections can be interpreted with caution, because a lot of the claims about holistic development are conceptual in nature and lack empirical evidence. The literature also points out that it is not wise to assume that a traditional practice is good or equally effective in all educational contexts. So context, diverse kinds of learner groups, and critical interpretation are still some of the major considerations (Chatterjee, 2025; Dey & Mitra, 2025; Kumari & Niyogi, 2025).

All in all, while the literature points out possibilities such as holistic development, values, and emotional well-being which could be enhanced through integration of indigenous knowledge systems in education, there is a lack of empirical evidence connecting these specific strategies with clearly defined developmental results.

3.4 Teacher/Faculty Preparedness and Institutional Capacity: The role of teachers and other educational staff in being able and willing to integrate Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) into teaching is an important prerequisite. The sources indicate that in addition to teacher training, professional development, orientation programmes for other educational staff, as well as knowledge of IKS content and pedagogical ways of teaching it, are all needed. This is seen as important for linking traditional knowledge to modern curricula while upholding cultural sensitivity, academic standards, and diversity of views (Baral, 2024; Chatterjee, 2025; Khan & Sharma, 2024a).

A third condition that has to be in place is that the institution has the capacity to run programmes like these. Curriculum development, availability of learning materials, research facilities, training of staff, and support from the institution are factors that can help implement such programmes and are mentioned here. The paper also notes the existence of IKS centres, projects, digital resources, and partnerships between academic institutions and other organisations as being discussed in the literature (Asagar, 2025; Baral, 2024; Chandra et al., 2024; Khan & Sharma, 2024a).

The literature also discusses challenges such as inadequate teacher training, insufficient learning materials, infrastructure, unclear curricular guidelines, lack of support from the research sector, language and access barriers, and limited expertise/knowledge (Baral, 2024; Chatterjee, 2025; Khan & Sharma, 2024a). Taken together, these findings show that policy recognition is not enough for effective and widespread implementation through schools or at the institutional level.

3.5 Critical, Inclusive, and Evidence-Based Integration: Key questions raised in the literature relate to how IKS can be included without compromising engagement or epistemic openness. Several studies argue that IKS should not be treated as a unified system of knowledge or as static information, but should instead be recognised as heterogeneous, fluid, and processualand also be given space and be critically examined, drawing, where relevant, on local knowledge and practices and disciplinary evidence and norms.

Another challenge is inclusion. The literature raises questions about the representation of indigenous, tribal, folk, women's, and other marginalized knowledge traditions and the danger of homogenizing or replicating historical exclusions in formal settings (Kumari & Niyogi, 2025; Dey & Mitra, 2025; Chatterjee, 2025; Asagar, 2025). Inclusive integration in this way inevitably involves paying attention not just to the inclusion of different kinds of knowledge but to who 'owns' that knowledge and how it is interpreted, transmitted, and learned.

The other body of literature warns against romanticisation, essentialism, and uncritical portrayal of traditional knowledge. Instead of assuming universal validity and appropriateness of traditional claims, a number of researchers stress contextual interpretation, critical inquiry, scientific validation, if necessary, and engagement with other forms of knowledge (Asagar, 2025; Chatterjee, 2025; Vageeshan & Kamalakar, 2025).

In short, the literature favours a balanced approach that recognises diversity within Indian knowledge systems while upholding the importance of critical engagement, the recognition of differences and diversity, contextual considerations, and standards of evidence (Dey & Mitra, 2025). Empirical data are relatively limited on how these issues are managed in practice within the classroom.

4. Discussion / Analysis: Using the thematic synthesis, it can be concluded that IKS integration is an iterative and multidimensional process, where the curriculum, pedagogy, learner development, teacher preparation, institutional support, and critical engagement with knowledge are related and feed into each other: the curriculum should provide the scope for IKS inclusion, pedagogy provides a means of experiencing knowledge, while the capacity of teachers and institutions supports implementation. Holistic development sets the educational rationale, and the critical and inclusive approaches may guide how IKS is selected and interpreted.

Another important link identified is between curriculum and pedagogy. Merely integrating IKS into curricula does not automatically enable learners to access it. Literature in this way prioritises practices that are experiential, dialogic, contextualised, and practice-based, thereby linking the curriculum with the experience of learners (Asagar, 2025; Kumari & Niyogi, 2025).

Moving from policy and curricular intentions to the practice of education depends further on teachers' and institutions' capacities, knowledge, and structures. Teachers need to be equipped with subject knowledge, pedagogical reflection, resources, and institutional support to operationalise a curricular intention meaningfully in teaching and learning. Institutions would need appropriate and context-specific institutional structures and teacher development plans, learning resources, research capacity, and knowledge holders and practitioners.

The literature consistently describes IKS integration at a broad level as progressing from IKS being integrated into the curriculum through the enactment of IKS practices embedded within institutions. There is a lot of conceptual and policy literature that explores the potential of IKS for learning, but more limited empirical evidence from implementation and learning outcomes. These provide some directions for future research.

5. Research Gaps and Future Directions: The review identifies five major gaps in the literature on integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into contemporary education. First, empirical evidence of implementation is limited, as much of the literature focuses on proposed curricular arrangements, pedagogic practices, and the potential educational contributions, with limited evidence of how these approaches are implemented in practice. Therefore, the literature needs to address the empirical evidence of IKS integration.

Second, each of the practices based on IKS identified above should be examined further empirically to determine how they are related to learner development. While many of the IKS-related practices mentioned above are related to the development of values, well-being, and ethics, the literature has not sufficiently examined these practices empirically in relation to specific outcomes. Future research should explore how each of the practices based on IKS is related to certain aspects of students' learning and development in specific educational contexts.

Third, more empirical work is needed on both teacher readiness and institutional capacity. While the literature discusses teacher training and development, materials, facilities, and organisational arrangements as preconditions for implementation, we have very little evidence on current teacher readiness and how capacity-building approaches work in practice. There is a need to study the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional development of teachers and other key educational professionals, as well as institutional factors that influence implementation.

Fourth, more attention should be paid to the diversity in and representation of different knowledge traditions in IKS-related education. Existing literature raises concerns about the homogenising tendency of Indian knowledge traditions and the marginalisation of indigenous, tribal, folk, women's, and other forms of knowledge. Empirical research should explore how these traditions are viewed, selected, represented, interpreted, and integrated into the syllabus and teaching methods of educational programmes.

Fifth, there is a need for additional research to explore how to strike a balance between academic rigour, critical inquiry, and cultural contexts within IKS integration. The possible romanticisation, essentialism, and uncritical acceptance of cultural groups' narratives, histories, and practices in the literature remain concerns, and questions remain about the transferability of such uncritical approaches to historical interpretation and practice in present and future contexts.

6. Conclusion: After going through the literature on integrating indigenous knowledge systems into the education system at present, this narrative review identified curriculum, teaching style, holistic development, teacher and institutional capability, and other factors as the main areas of focus. The literature presents IKS as a diverse and dynamic body of knowledge that can be integrated through curricular and interdisciplinary approaches, as well as experiential and contextual teaching methods. It also presents IKS as a source of values, well-being, moral development, and other dimensions of holistic education. However, the analysis indicates that genuine integration goes beyond superficially adding local knowledge to existing curricula. Curriculum, teaching style, educators' preparedness, institutional environment, and openness towards diverse traditional knowledge systems are interconnected. Therefore, meaningful integration requires consideration of academic rigour, inclusivity, contextual relevance, and appropriate standards of evidence when incorporating IKS into mainstream education.

A key point of the review is that although policy attention and research on IKS have increased, the available literature has not yet provided sufficient evidence of its implementation in practice. Future research should therefore investigate IKS integration at the grassroots level, with particular attention to teachers' and learners' viewpoints, the manner in which diverse knowledge systems are incorporated, and their relationship with holistic development. Such studies can contribute to a stronger evidence base for culture-based and inclusive strategies for implementing IKS while maintaining academic rigour and contextual relevance.

Overall, the synthesis suggests that meaningful integration of IKS requires more than inserting new content into existing educational structures. It calls for appropriate curriculum planning, pedagogical approaches, teacher development, institutional support, and critical engagement with diverse knowledge traditions. Future efforts should therefore consider how these interconnected elements can support the responsible and contextually relevant integration of IKS into contemporary education.

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Citation: **Joshi. J. & Tandel. S.,** (2024) "Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into Contemporary Education: A Narrative Review", *Bharati International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Development (BIJMRD)*, Vol-4, Issue-09, September-2026.